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IN PURPLE AND GOLD





A





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IN PURPLE AND GOLD.

IN PURPLE AND GOLD.

By C. B.



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To the Immortal Memory
OF THE
DIVINEST GENIUS AND THE SWEETEST HEART THESE LATTER DAYS
HAVE KNOWN,

I DEDICATE THIS TALE,
WITH DEEP HUMILITY ;

AN OFFERING, UNWORTHY, BUT MY BEST.

C. B.



IN PURPLE AND GOLD.

PART I.

"I love you ! Listen, O embodied ray
Of the great brightness ; I must pass away
While you remain, and these light words must be
Tokens by which you may remember me."

Shelley.

HE is my dearest friend in all the world,—of all the golden lights that now fill the world with glory, my bright particular star. I have known him from a child, and we were at school together. Walsingham's shadow they called him, the boyish throng, never guessing that the slight, delicate boy, with the eager bright eyes, the shrinking sensitiveness, the girlish hectic tints, whom I

protected in public, was the shrine at which I worshipped in my heart. How should they guess it, knowing nothing of the great soul and only faintly feeling the sweetness of the child's heart? "None but the gods recognize the gods," says Emerson,—that I, without a shred of claim to divinity, saw it here, must have been from the excess of light poured on me for so long, in such continued and intimate companionship.

However it was, I knew it and rejoiced, and when we came to manhood, and his invalid father and his loving, trembling mother confided their treasure, their only child, to my care,—albeit I was only two years older than he,—*I* undertook the charge with reverence and a great joy.

Neither his parents nor mine were rich, and we had both disappointed them in our respective choice of a profession. Captain Challoner had been in the Navy, but had long retired on account of having "enjoyed such bad health," the country people used quaintly to tell. I am inclined to pronounce his enjoyment of it doubtful,—the trial

of it to his patient, watchful wife was beyond all question. That the fair gem of the household, their talented, precious, unequalled Edmond should paint beautiful pictures among the other wonderful things that he accomplished seemed natural enough, but that he should be resolutely bent on following art as a profession was the first grief he had given them. Captain Challoner was accustomed, for some reasons unknown, to regard artists as a generally atheistical and slipshod class, while his wife had an equally unaccountable conviction that they were immoral. Both were agreed in its being the worst possible thing for their perfect, their immaculate boy to enter this dangerous company. They had two hundred a year consecrated to his sole use,—could he not enter the Church, or some such easy, sheltered profession, paint pictures still for pleasure, and remain near them? Ah, of course he wished to settle near them some day; was he not loving beyond all?—only he *must* study for some years, he pleaded, and quit them to study with a

whole heart the art to which he was devoted. His parents could not see then that when the gods visit the earth they have a work to do and cannot rest, that they know they are only lent for a space, and that too often the rapt, eager spirit racks even unwittingly and shatters all unconscious with its own force the frail shell within which it is sent to dwell. Divinity is never voiceless, it cannot pass and leave no sign,—for the warrior, laurels, for the queen, gems, and for the children, flowers; but the gods scatter grace for their own love's sake, and turn not from their own paths for any greed of ease, or worldly praise, or gain.

And so love and the child of light prevailed, and an artist young Edmond Challoner was allowed to be. My parents were scarcely less displeased with the line I had chosen. “Book-making, forsooth! it is a poor trade, in which *one* makes a fortune and thousands starve,” they said. But their opposition was not continued; there were others to be thought of. If I *would* risk such a

perilous course I must even do it. They would give me, for a stated number of years, the same sum allotted to my friend Edmond Challoner, and we might go forth together.

How hopefully, how joyfully we went forth, that glorious child and I! I have said we had both reached manhood. I should have said the age of manhood, for youth clung long to Challoner; in truth its grace and glow seem a part of his nature, for it lingers round him still.

An absurd adventure we had occurs to me à propos of this. We had been a year in Belgium, and had returned for a short visit to our home friends. One summer evening we had wandered out, and Challoner, tempted by some special loveliness amongst the million beauties that he found in all Nature, sat down to paint, whilst I, for sympathy, drew out a book, and studied silently by his side. But I am mortal only, and idleness crept over me. I tried to read, to make notes,—all in vain; so, leaving the book and memoranda by my friend, I went away for a stroll.

On my return I found he had moved his place, but my book was safe,—no notes though. Some village boys were playing near. “Mischievous monkeys!” I shouted, “you have taken my papers!”

“No, no,” they answered with one voice; “’twarn’t we, it was that *other boy*,” pointing to Challoner.

How merrily he laughed, and dubbed himself “that other boy” for long. Common clay is apt to be ashamed of a youthful appearance, but the gods are ever young, and rejoice in it.

Another day we had walked a great distance in intensely hot weather. Arriving at a barn, Challoner threw himself upon a heap of straw freshly threshed and placed outside. He had lain there a few minutes with closed eyes, when a rough-looking countrywoman passing, stopped, and regarding him with a sudden pleasure, exclaimed softly, “Hey, Duckey, be ’ee comfortable?” As he opened his eyes, and she shyly turned away, I saw on her relaxed lips the reflection of his divine smile.

We spent another year in that city of delight —gay Paris. With the French, Challoner has a keen sympathy; their quick perceptive faculties, their light-heartedness, their freedom from prejudice, their kindly, graceful ways, all charmed him. The one side not so fair of the national character (if such a distinction can be admitted to exist in these mixed-up days), Challoner could not, or did not choose to, recognize. We were very happy in Paris, and learnt much there.

Another year of deeper joy we spent in Italy, —a quieter time was this, but full of purest happiness. Then we came home, and settled in London, devoting ourselves steadily to serious work.

It is not my intention here to record the history of the pictures which have brought and kept my friend in so high a position before the half-puzzled yet fascinated eyes of the British public. They have nothing to do with the episode of which I desire especially to write the history, yet let me describe one of the earliest and most

ideal, which lives abidingly in my memory. It was a wide canvas, showing a lovely garden, painted closely from, and indeed intended as, an illustration of the great Shelley's exquisite poem of 'The Sensitive Plant.' The following verses, the text, as it were, of it, fully explained the one graceful figure :—

"There was a power in this sweet place,
An Eve in this Eden ; a ruling grace,
Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
Was as God is to the starry scheme.

A lady, the wonder of her kind,
Whose form was up-borne by a lovely mind,
Which, dilating, had moulded her mien and motion,
Like a sea-flower unfolded beneath the ocean."

I think even the Immortal Poet would have smiled with pleasure at Challoner's realization of his sweet dream. With a reverential tenderness, with a worshipping love, with every nerve tingling from excess of sympathy with the beauty and grace of the poem was this picture worked out. Scant wonder that it appealed to both heart and eyes, and feasted them. Then the

dreams of the ideal passed for awhile, and other voices made themselves heard. The time came to young Challoner, which comes to all sooner or later, when men sicken for the clinging of soft arms, and look with a new wistfulness upon red lips and women's tender eyes. He had peculiar theories on this subject, and I looked on with anxiety, the more so when I found that one of his favourite models (a woman of whom I had a reasonable horror) was making very artful advances to him. As she left one evening, I took occasion to remark pointedly on the disadvantages and unhappiness resulting from a *liaison* of the kind in the case of a friend of ours.

"The sort of union that breeds toads," commented Challoner with a languid disgust.*

I felt considerably relieved. Then he fell to work with a stern will, and laboured out the travail of his soul. The result was his splendid

* As resulting from the worst sycophancy on the one side, and the lowest kind of gratification on the other, without a spark of divine love about it. Recalling the case in point, I imagine this to have been my friend's meaning.

picture of Absalom and Tamar. He chose to paint the scene described in the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the Second Book of Samuel, from the history of that far-famed young man, so proudly, faultlessly beautiful without, so vile within, who had yet in his early youth one human affection amidst all his overwhelming sensuality and brutishness—a touching, even sublime tenderness for his sister Tamar, whose wrongs certainly justified him in much that followed. “And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying. And Absalom her brother said unto her, ‘Hath Ammon thy brother been with thee? But hold now thy peace, my sister; he is thy brother; regard not this thing.’ So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom’s house.”

What precise train of circumstances or of thought led to this selection I cannot tell. It seems to me that in the careers of all great

geniuses there is a morbid stage inevitable. Notable examples could be adduced in support of this ; a few must recur to all—they are so numerous. That most pure and perfect of all—the divine Shelley—must surely have produced the ‘Cenci’ in some such mood. Challoner gave himself up with an extraordinary excitement to the picture in question. With exclusive, rapt attention, scrupulous care, and almost ceaseless labour day and night, he designed, drew, searched unweariedly for models, coloured, and at length finished the most perfect realization of the scene that could well be conceived ; the Absalom was magnificent, the Tamar the most exquisite, the saddest, most touching of all embodiments of angel innocence deceived and wrecked. It was an astonishing work.

One day, soon after it was finished, as Challoner sat before it, in humour depressed and thoughtful still, yet evidently much calmer, and adding a light touch here and there with his magic brush, a *confrère* sauntered in—a good,

practical, sensible fellow, but without any soul. “*Dio mio!*” he exclaimed, “what! finished already! Well, old fellow, it’s a great picture, there’s no denying that; what a pity it’s so deucedly improper in subject.”

Challoner rose up with a start, and, walking to the window, turned his back.

“There is one thing I can’t make out,” continued the new comer to me, “and that is, what magic Challoner practises to produce such results from such models. I know the brown woman who sat for Tamar, and have painted from her scores of times; she is not beautiful a bit, at least I never thought her so before; yet here she is, an unmistakable likeness, yet divine.”

Ah, here indeed was the real mystery—the secret that he and such as he can never realize; unto these it is not given to understand that true genius not only reflects perforce its own divinity, but with unclouded eyes penetrating in all Nature, the designs of the Great Artist presents them back unblurred by sin, or want, or shame, beautiful exceedingly, and yet the same.

This picture was rejected by the Academy ; the subject was said to be an offence to the morals of society. It struck me as a fair objection, the morals of society being so entirely at variance with truth and nature. Here, however, I feel on dangerous ground ; this being a matter I do not find easy of comprehension, and feel too little interested in, to study. Soon after finishing the painting, Challoner went home to rest and recruit, and during his absence a connoisseur bought the picture for a large sum.

The following quaint passage that occurred in one of his letters to me about this time will show how he had gradually regained a free, light fancy, and cool blood. He writes, “ We are all ill here, as usual ; even the dog has a face-ache, and the hedgehog an attack of ague. Being in the midst of so much sympathetic suffering is quite confusing, and I find myself, in answer to condoling inquiries, constantly assuming, in good faith, some one else’s symptoms. In fact, at this moment, I am not quite clear whether it is not

my dear mother or myself that has face-ache, and not old Tray, yet his cheek is certainly swelled —you must judge for yourself.”

It was early in March the following year. I had been absent from London for about ten days on business. As I was detained a minute or two on the staircase on my return, it gladdened me to hear sung, in Challoner’s ringing, delicious tones, those glorious lines from Shelley’s ‘Revolt of Islam’:

“The good and mighty of departed ages
Are in their graves ; the innocent and free,
Heroes and poets, and prevailing sages,
Who leave the vesture of their Majesty
To adorn and clothe this naked world,”—

Here he stopped, then shouted through his open door, “Is that Walsingham ?” and ran down to meet me. The very first thing, I was marched up into the studio ; he had something new to show me, “this time nothing ideal, fanciful, or improper,” he said, adding, with a merry laugh, the *quality* have been here, Walsingham, and I

“

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have been making use of them ; see ! This is only a preliminary daub, of course, but you will understand."

I saw a sumptuously-furnished room, crowded with ornament oppressively luxurious ; in the foreground, a single figure in a dress of rich purple silk, leaning listlessly back in an easy-chair ; one arm was on her chair, the hand supporting her head—a noble head, with a great coronet of golden hair. The other arm rested on the table ; the hand (the left one) held up with a peculiar significance. On the delicate wrist was a heavy bracelet,—a gold cable-chain,—fastened with a padlock. On the white, slender fingers a number of glittering rings ; over the marriage-ring a hoop of amethysts. On these two last especially the lady's eyes were bent ; sad eyes they seemed, and about the closed lips was a look of sullen hopelessness, of weariness, of pent-up thought, quite indescribable. I asked, "What shall you call yon poor captive ?"

Challoner answered, "She may name herself if

she ever recognizes the likeness. I mean only to call the picture ‘In Purple and Gold.’”

“I recognize her,” I continued, “it is Lady Temple, and I know something of her history; do you?”

He replied, “Nothing, indeed; she came here with her husband Sir Julian Temple to look at my pictures, and her sullen grace arrested my attention; she is only a girl now, but she will be a fine woman, and her face is suggestive, making one dream of a soul asleep or dozing, only waiting for light and fresh sweet air to rouse itself, and become great and beautiful.”

I said, “She is not likely to have either; she is the fifth and fairest daughter of the Honourable Mr. Cavendish, was presented last year, and married at the end of the season. All his girls go off well, notwithstanding the depressed state of the marriage market,—they are so handsome and well-trained. It was reported this one resisted,—and certainly Sir Julian Temple is about as harsh and repulsive-looking a lover as might

be easily picked up for a young girl,—but she was only eighteen; how could she know what was best for her; and he had £9000 a year, which settled the business. It seems hard, but it is the way of the world; and, after all, what is a man to do with five daughters who are all helpless to earn a living? Marriage is a woman's natural vocation."

"That I deny," interrupted Challoner; "before God they are just as free to take or decline it, or even to make a temporary arrangement, as we are; and when Society amends its ways, and brings up its daughters to independent professions in the same way as its sons, see if women will not make their rights felt and honoured; meantime let us read what the great Master said —the freest, purest spirit that ever mourned over blind mortality;" and opening Shelley's 'Epipsychedion,' he read:—

"It is in the code
Of modern morals and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead

By the broad highway of the world, and, so,
With one *chained friend*, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dearest and the longest journey go.

“True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away ;
Love is like understanding that grows bright
Gazing on many truths.”

“Good heavens ! dear Challoner,” I cried,
“you can hardly mean that you would like your
lady-love to gaze on many ?”

Like the man fancy free he was, he answered
lightly, “I have no lady-love, *amigo mio*, but
when I have I shall certainly not question her
freedom. Constancy is a matter of temperament,
and faith is the gift of God ; the heartless imita-
tions of them produced by unnatural institutions
are of no value.”

It is one thing to design a picture, it is another to paint it, and this last-named one gave
Challoner a great deal of trouble. In the first
place, a great many fine things had to be col-
lected quite out of the line of my friend’s taste
or mine ; in the second, numbers of well-made

young women can be procured who will lean back in an arm-chair for a shilling an hour with pleasure, but the perfect ease and grace with which hereditary idleness can lounge and muse is extremely difficult to find among professional models. It is so lady-like, and with what a modern French writer happily calls the *parfum de race*,—a distinguishing point in Lady Temple,—had to be supplied as best it might from Challoner's own imagination or memory. But the hardest thing after all was the face, which he was determined should be a likeness. We had no acquaintances in Lady Temple's circle, and our only way of seeing her was at the opera—where she was pretty regular, fortunately, in her attendance—or in passing glimpses in the Park. As we were leaving the opera one night, we happened to pass very near her. She looked at Challoner with grave earnestness and bowed. He remarked to me carelessly, “That's an unexpected honour; I hardly thought Lady Temple could have recognized me, except, perhaps, as

a passing memory of a man who sold pictures."

By dint of hard work the task was accomplished in time to be sent to the Royal Academy, where it found favour, and was well hung. A few days after the opening Challoner and I were walking through, and, in the crowd, almost stumbled upon Lady Temple, standing attentively examining the painting. "Come away," whispered Challoner.

I replied, "Wait one minute, I want to see if the likeness is good."

I suppose our voices so near attracted her notice, for she turned, and, moving a step nearer Challoner, she said in a low, most touching voice, and yet with a certain suppressed anger, "Mr. Challoner, is it well that you should thus publicly show your contempt for me? You are mistaken, too; the purple and the gold have ever been, and are, valueless in my eyes; I will prove it." Then she rejoined her party, giving him no time to answer.

We passed on, Challoner leaning with evidently unconscious heaviness upon my arm, and looking pained; but it was some minutes before he made any remark. At last he exclaimed suddenly, "Walsingham, I told you that woman had a soul to be saved!"

"Shall you undertake its salvation?" I inquired; but he frowned, and I felt my levity reprobated.

Very shortly after this, Captain Challoner had a more serious illness even than usual, and his son went home and stayed there for some time.

It was near the end of the season when he returned to me, and he had only been back in town a few days, when the following paragraph appeared in all the daily papers:—

"MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.—On the 19th, Lady Temple was missed from her home. She had previously expressed an intention of spending that day with a sister living at Richmond, but the carriage had not been ordered, nor did any one see her leave the house; and all re-

searches after her present whereabouts, or even about the precise hour of her flight or abduction, whichever it was, have been fruitless. With a stainless reputation, an affectionate husband, and a large circle of admiring friends and relatives, it has been found impossible to imagine any probable motive for her departure of her own accord. She was to have left London with Sir Julian for their country-seat on the 26th. A large reward has been offered for any information that may unravel this mystery."

The matter affected my friend even painfully. He had never seen Lady Temple since the day she had spoken to him in the Academy, and he had certainly been blameless of any intention to wound the unfortunate young girl; but he had shown her her desolation; he had possibly realized to her the rebellion of spirit, of which, perhaps, before she had been but faintly conscious; besides, had not her words proved that he had awakened her soul; and what was the result? poor, helpless woman, what was it likely to be?

It weighed heavily and long on Challoner's mind, and I used to fancy he was seeking her many times, but he said little, and avoided discussing the subject. As nothing more was discovered, or at least published, it gradually dropped. The picture was sold, and the whole episode passed out of sight if not out of mind.

PART II.

Two years had fled away. Challoner, who was an enthusiast about Shelley's poetry, was full of a design, long cherished, to paint a "Cynthia;" and, morning, noon, or night, whenever we were together, I had to listen to, or read to him, 'The Revolt of Islam.' I certainly should have been driven to the verge of insanity with half so much of any other writer as I had of Shelley during these years; but it is a triumphant proof of the true inspiration of his works, that the more one has of them the more one craves to have; and the more adoringly one loves that amazing genius, which, being dead, yet speaketh, which,

being in its spirit and perfection too high to be revealed, yet to all, has left such inexhaustible treasures of delight to those who can look upward without fear and onward without fainting.

Shelley,—the Light personified,—the thought of whom makes us proud as gods that such a spirit once wore our flesh, and yet again humbled to the dust, that we remain so far beneath him, —so very far,—that even still to the million, his divine utterances are melodies in an unknown tongue. What wonder? yet what deepest humiliation, that his short life amongst us was one of continued disappointment and keenest suffering! How eloquent of the world's shame that he should have written the last year of his life to a dear friend, “My faculties are shaken to atoms, and torpid. I can write nothing; and if ‘Adonais’ had no success, and excited no interest, what incentive can I have to write?” Oh, heart of love rejected! Oh, cruel, stone-blind world! how long will you hiss at your

prophets, and stone them that are sent unto you? How long will Heaven forbear?

Naturally, there was more difficulty than ever in finding a practicable model for the designed picture. I think it was to be from the commencement of the eleventh canto, and Challoner was almost irritably excited on the subject.

One day, he was cutting a pencil with a most reckless carelessness, and nearly sliced off the top of his finger. A peculiar physical sensitiveness always makes him feel faint at the sight of blood, so he thrust it before me with an averted head, and an entreaty that I would bind it up, adding, impatiently, "And tie it up tight, man, and don't be afraid."

"Why, Walsingham, I declare you haven't the nerves of a stout flea."

As I protested against this whimsical and unreasonable accusation, Mr. Whiston walked in, the artist who had regretted the impropriety of Challoner's '*Absalom*'.

"Oh, Challoner," he exclaimed, "I have stum-

bled upon such a beauty, just the model for your Cythna; such majesty of proportion; such a shape; such a throat and head. *Dio mio!* they would be each perfect studies, but it's all no good. When I asked the girl to give me a sitting, she turned away as if I had insulted her,—a puritanical prude."

"Where did you see her, and who is she?" asked Challoner, who had turned as white as a sheet from the pain or shock from his cut finger, but was pleased to move nonchalantly about the room, as if he rather enjoyed it than otherwise.

Whiston answered, "Oh, she's only a servant; I don't know her name; the upper housemaid at a Mr. Toller's, who lives in Kensington. One of my cousins dragged me there to call with her on Mrs. Toller, who knows several of my people, and this goddess opened the door. By Jove, she's a handsome woman!"

"What is the address?" said Challoner (with a slight gasp, but still resolutely), as he drew out

his pencil and marked it down at Whiston's dictation.

"Only it's no good, you know," pursued the latter, "because I tell you the girl is not to be had."

"Indeed!" answered my friend, with a slight accent of incredulity in which he was certainly justified, for he had a winning way with women, for whom he had a singular attraction.

"You are so nice, I should like to squeeze and kiss you all day," remarked a candid little damsel of ten years old to him once, and I have observed the same desire indicated in different ways by many of her sex of double her years, who never let slip an opportunity of touching or being touched by him. The peculiar pleasure of this it would perhaps be difficult to analyse; but it is not the less amusing to watch how much putting into position some models want when sitting for him, or with what charming simplicity ladies will make him try on their rings, or fasten their bracelets, or their gloves;

these latter having a special tendency to come unfastened in his vicinity. Truth to say, Challoner is nothing backward in giving or receiving these attentions, and probably the delicious unconsciousness of his manner of doing it is not his least charm.

But I was interrupted in these reflections by a “Hullo, what’s the matter!” from Whiston, and then a low “Walsingham be so kind,” from Challoner, who then sank back in a faint on the sofa.

When he came round again, I inquired anxiously if his finger were very painful.

“Not at all,” he answered coolly, “it was only the pretty sight of the top hanging loose that upset me. I could not get it out of my head; pleasures of imagination, my friend, nothing more.”

I really believe he was right; his organization was the most acutely sensitive I have ever known.

The next day he came into my room, dressed

with a scrupulous care, and looking even more than ordinarily "nice," he said "*L'ami*, go and make yourself respectable, you are to pay a visit with me."

"Where?" I asked.

He answered, "At Kensington. Now be quick and don't ask any more questions."

We went off merrily, Challoner in gay spirits. When we arrived at the address mentioned by Whiston, and in answer to his knock and ring, the handsome housemaid duly appeared; he, first raising his hat (with his invariable homage, not to the position but to the *sex*), inquired "Kindly tell me if Mr. Marcus Aurelius is at home?"

A curiously intelligent smile passed over the servant's face, but it was instantly suppressed, and she answered gravely, "You have made a mistake, Sir; no such gentleman lives here."

"Really?" responded Challoner. "Pray pardon me then for having troubled you, also being irresistibly tempted, for asking a favour. I am

an artist, therefore a worshipper of beauty. Will you do me the honour to give me a few sittings?"

"I—I have never sat to an artist," said the girl, hesitating.

"But you have no cause for fear," he rejoined eagerly; "this gentleman (pointing to me) will be present, and you will not be bound to stay an instant longer than you wish. Allow me to give you my card, and promise me your very first spare hour or two. You will so deeply oblige me; nothing that I could offer will adequately repay it; you can name your own terms."

"No," returned the maid in a low mellow voice, very sweet, "it's not that."

"Of course not," replied Challoner, "that is always easily settled; only come to me once, you will not repent it, and will certainly return. Please tell me your name?"

She answered "Helen Harding."

He pursued, "And on what day may I have the pleasure of seeing you?" to which she replied.

"I cannot tell yet, but I will write and let you know when I can be spared."

Upon this, Challoner made a low bow as to a princess, and we came away.

"Oh, my Cythna! my Cythna!" he exclaimed, when we were out of hearing. "At length I have found something like a worthy model. What an imperial vision! what a contour! what a throat! Walsingham, I shall die happy."

"A very fine woman, certainly," I answered, "and I don't see anything puritanical about her, except her stiff ugly cap and her frightful fashion of dragging all her hair off from her face; a handsome face too, didn't you think so?"

"Yes, rather; but I really did not look particularly. I could not keep my eyes off her lovely shoulders and throat; besides, I don't expect her face to suit."

In fact, Challoner could only dwell upon things in reference to his picture just then. I think his faculty of concentrating all his powers and attention upon whatever he seriously undertakes, is one reason why his work is so good.

A few days after, he tossed a note across the breakfast-table for me to read. It ran thus:—

“DEAR SIR,—I shall be at liberty for a few hours on Thursday afternoon, and will do myself the pleasure of waiting upon you at 3 o’clock, unless I hear from you that this arrangement will be inconvenient.

“Yours respectfully,

“HELEN HAEDING.”

I exclaimed, “Challoner, it is all very queer. Why did this woman refuse to sit to Whiston so scornfully, and consent to your similar request so readily; and then, this is not like the letter of a servant?”

He stopped in the graceful design with which he was musingly ornamenting the envelope and answered, “Some people don’t know how to ask a favour; and, as for the letter, I don’t see anything very particular in it; some of these London servants are very well educated, and clearly this girl is not a mere drudge; I saw that at once by

her hands. I expect I have done a stupid thing in asking her after all ; non-professional models generally give a great deal of trouble, and serious work from them entails much vexation of spirit."

Nevertheless, on the day named, the new model duly appeared, and was welcomed with *empressement* ; while the scene that followed was altogether so exceptional, that I feel it necessary to recall every detail with care and precision. It was by no means habitual for me to sit in Challoner's studio, I had my own work to do and my own room, but I loved to be with him, and to watch him painting ; therefore I certainly came there often, reckless, while he was pleased to have me, that some of his models wished me far enough. On the occasion in question my presence had been even promised ; but this, like everything else connected with it, was an exceptional circumstance. No one who knew Challoner—man, woman, or child—could have had the smallest objection to being alone with him, so great was the

confidence in his respect and consideration that he always inspired. Was it only to give the girl this confidence, or from an unacknowledged presentiment of a failing of self-command, that induced him to suggest my presence? The proceedings commenced by Challoner's showing her his design; and then encouraged, apparently by the modest intelligence of her looks and manner, he remarked, "It is always more satisfactory when the model is interested in the picture. Let me read to you the beautiful passage I wish to render in painting." Then motioning her to sit beside him, with a light touch upon her arm, he opened his Shelley, and commenced the eleventh canto of 'The Revolt of Islam.'

She listened attentively, looking over him for a minute; then she slightly moved, and gave a furtive but earnest glance into his face. The deep violet-blue of the grave, upraised eyes brought me a startling revelation. I could hardly contain my surprise, but a moment's reflection determined me to hold my peace.

Directly Challoner had finished reading, with all his soul full of the subject, he hastened to show her next the dress he wished her to put on, adding remorselessly, “And Miss Harding, you will, I trust, oblige me by only wearing what I give you. It is torturing when fair women confuse the beautiful lines of nature by thick folds of unnecessary clothing; besides, it effectually prevents any sort of justice being done to their beauty. In fact, it is difficult enough to do that without any; that is to say, even with what I have given you.”

It astonished me that he was too much absorbed in his preparations to notice the deep crimson flush that came into the girl’s face while he spoke, or the proud silence, so exquisitely chaste, with which she took the garments from him, and went into the next room to put them on; and it raised in me a feeling almost of anger that he could so completely sink the man in the artist in the presence of this unsophisticated, beautiful woman. But he was rapt in “Cythna,”

and to realize that glorious ideal on his canvas was the one engrossing aim of the hour.

The vesture assigned was, in truth, quite unobjectionable—the simple one familiar in sculpture—a sort of chemise reaching the shoulders, and confined with a belt or scarf round the waist. When Miss Harding entered in it, revealing her perfection of form, her divine grace of movement, the effect heightened by the nervous heaving of her breast, even then in Challoner's ravished gaze I could trace no lower thought.

Ordinarily, he would converse cheerily with his models during his work, but for this one he had no word. She looked at the design again, and posed herself, without his offering a single objection. He could have made none; the attitude, the lines, were faultless. One or two hasty sketches were made, and placed on one side; then the canvas was drawn closer, and with rapid hand, strained eyes, hot brow, and panting eagerness Challoner began to work in earnest. I had never seen him like this before. After he had

been engaged in this rapt fashion for about an hour, having given only two short intervals to his model to ease herself with a change of posture, I observed, by his knitted brows, that he was in some difficulty. But before I describe what followed, it is necessary to mention my own position in the room. I was writing at a side-table at some distance, but by slightly turning I could face the model, and have a side-view of Challoner.

Some half-smothered exclamations followed the knitting of his brows; then a despairing, abstracted look at his model, and some further impatient applications of his brush; then he suddenly started from his stool, flew to the girl, and laid a sacrilegious hand upon her dress, somewhere near her shoulder. His back was turned to me, but I distinctly saw her magnificent white arm raised, and the indignant fury with which she flung him back. The next moment he was clinging to her hand, and kneeling before her, crying, "Forgive—forgive! I was absorbed,

distracted with my difficulties. The folds were maddening ! I could not trace ! It was for my Art ; I forgot all else ; but I will humble myself to the dust. Oh, forgive ! you must forgive ! ”

She answered not a word, but drawing away her hand with force, she threw herself down upon the corner of a sofa near the door, and burying her head in the cushions, burst into tears ; while her long fair hair, twisted into a mass at the back of her head, and fastened with a comb, was shaken loose with the violence of her movement, and rolled down like a flood of gold. It brought the light to Challoner that her upraised eyes had given to me ; he exclaimed, “Lady Temple ! ” and at length fully awoke to a consciousness beyond his picture. The situation had now become so exceedingly embarrassing that I felt my longer presence as a spectator an intrusion, and left the room, but not before Challoner, deeply moved, had approached the sofa, and bending over, had recommenced some soothing penitent words.

When I returned to the studio an hour later, it was empty; and on inquiry I was informed that Mr. Challoner had gone away with "the young person."

He came back rather late, and before I could get a word out of him he marched up to his studio, and deliberately began unfastening his canvas from the frame.

"What's that for?" I exclaimed.

"I give up my 'Cythna,'" he replied; "that dream is over, and I must put it out of sight."

I pursued, "It is not possible that you are yet unforgiven."

"Hush," he answered hurriedly and low, "don't speak of that again; it's—it's done with, but I can never ask her to sit for me again—I don't even wish to—and the picture shall not be associated with any one else." As he spoke, he rolled it up and took it away.

Soon after, while we sat together in the evening, he briefly gave me the following explanation of Lady Temple's extraordinary position, learnt

from herself. Her marriage had been grievously against her inclination, but as she had no special reason to give for her dislike to Sir Julian, and her sisters had married with the same slight knowledge of their lovers and proved happy, she was persuaded that it was her duty to gratify her parents by following these bright examples, and, being so young, to obey her elders, who all assured her that their only desire was her happiness. But after her marriage, the slight dislike deepened into a distressing disgust, which, becoming apparent to her husband, filled him with vindictive anger.

Brought up in habits of submission, the unfortunate girl dared not openly rebel, but she was extremely miserable. In her parent's house, having been the last in the schoolroom, she had been allowed more liberty than the others in the intervals of her studies with the governess, and she had attached herself deeply to one of the servants, an upper housemaid, whom she secretly delighted to assist in her work.

This occupation and companionship had inspired in her an envy of all those who lived independently by their labour, and a combination of circumstances made the longing to do so herself an overwhelming desire. The sight of the picture of 'In Purple and Gold,' in the Academy, added a feeling of shame to the other distresses of her position, and she resolved from that hour to run away, *coute que coute*, and commence a new life. It was months, however, before she could hit upon a practicable plan.

At length, she heard with delight that the favourite servant was in town for a holiday, visiting her sister, a dressmaker; and taking nothing with her but a few jewels of value, she slipped out of the house one day while the hall footman was at his dinner, and made her way to her humble friend.

There, at her earnest prayer, she was concealed by being dressed like one of the family, and passed off as a country relation. She was traced there by the detective employed by Sir

Julian, but her prayers not to be betrayed, aided by the gift of her most valuable jewels for his wife, prevailed on him to promise not to betray her, and he never did.

For a little while she occupied herself assiduously in perfecting herself in the duties of domestic service (feeling that her education had been too superficial for teaching, and even preferring the other line), and not very long after her friend left London, the dressmaker obtained for her the situation of parlour-maid, which she now occupied. She had never regretted her flight; her master and mistress were quiet, middle-aged people, without children, particular, but not harsh; two other servants were kept, so the work was not heavy, and they were both staid, respectable women.

Lady Temple had no friends in Kensington, and considering this, her position, and her changed style of dress, she had run the least possible chance of recognition.

“But how was it *we* did not recollect her, I

wonder," I remarked when he had told me all this.

He said, "A sense of something familiar did strike me at first, but there was no clue to connect it with Lady Temple; besides, her cap and the way she disposed of her beautiful hair altered her so, and then her figure had so grandly developed with the time and her healthful exertion."

"True," I answered, "but tell me, Challoner, why did she refuse to sit to Whiston and consent to come to you?"

He replied shortly, "I did not ask her."

I continued, "Did she recognise you?" He nodded, and I added, "Then I can understand the reason, I think."

He took up a newspaper, and became apparently absorbed in its contents.

Of course all the foregoing information had been imparted in strict confidence, and we held ourselves bound to keep Lady Temple's secret. I did not see her again for some weeks, but I

observed that Challoner fell into a habit of walking alone towards Kensington very often, and that on Sundays he used regularly to be absent in that direction for some hours; also I knew that many notes and books passed between them.

It was a chilly Sunday afternoon in early autumn, when finding a pleasant fire in the studio, I stayed there to read, though Challoner was absent. I had not been there long when he entered with Lady Temple. She was embarrassed evidently at encountering me, but there was so much found for her to examine and admire in the room, that her attention was soon otherwise engaged, and all seemed serene. A short time after, however, while we were all looking over some photographs Challoner and I had collected in Rome, accident revealed to me that he was holding his ex-model's hand under the table, and that my presence was *de trop*.

"Of course," I reflected, "love-making is impracticable to any extent in the public roads, and they have come here for the very purpose; here

is the secret of the pleasant fire," so I made an excuse and departed.

I certainly did right, for as they came downstairs, an hour later, and passed my door (which has a chronic disorder in the lock, and can't keep shut), I heard Challoner exclaim passionately.

"Oh, Helen, it was so sweet!" and some melodious murmuring of faint remonstrance from her in reply.

If there was now no purple, there was at least a world full of golden delights about the paths of these two at this time, and certainly there was something even extra sweet floating about Challoner that night.

As we sat together I remarked, as little regretfully as I could manage it, "Challoner, you will soon have a new companion; you must give me a little notice to look out for fresh quarters."

He drew his chair close to mine, and placing his clasped hands upon my shoulder in a loving way he has, and resting his chin upon them, he

murmured, "Friend of my soul, how can you talk so? you know *she* is not free?"

I repeated, "Not free! do you intend her to return to her husband, then?"

He exclaimed, "To Sir Julian, never! I could not suffer it; but he must release her altogether before she is free to come to me."

"But, Challoner, I thought you scorned the obligations of matrimony."

He answered, "I certainly consider it a mistaken and tyrannous expedient, but all popular institutions, as long as they exist, are entitled to a certain respect, to say nothing of the sacredness of religious and social compacts. When two people enter into an agreement, in common fairness neither can be released from it without mutual consent. My poor Helen made a grievous mistake; *she* cannot undo it so easily."

"With such views, by what right do you call her *your* Helen?" I asked.

He answered with the smile of a seraph, "By right of love, the over-mastering power,—by

right of the supreme will which is above all contracts, bonds, or vows, and is a triumphant proof of their folly. My Helen obeyed an impulse born of the righteous protest of her soul when she fled from a connection which was an offence against nature—a loveless, adulterous intercourse of the sort, from which are born the heartless, soulless children which make the misery of the world. No lower motive could be attributed to her, and, so far, she is amply justified; but because she could not fulfil every obligation she blindly undertook, she is not fairly released from all.”

I asked, “And how long will you and she be satisfied with this state of things and a mere spiritual union?”

He laughed the gay light laugh of youth and hope as he answered, “Not long, assuredly, as no one shall or ought to be satisfied with less than fulness of perfection; and a union that is not that of body, soul, and spirit, is cruelly imperfect. *Amigo mio!* I have a vision that the

human race will never attain its fitting strength and greatness unless such unions become the rule,—unless all others are recognized in their hideous sinfulness, in their degenerate fruits, to be the cruellest wrong to humanity, the deadliest of social offences. The world shuts up its angels, it drives its youth to devils; it strains at the gnats of unconventionality, and swallows the monster of real immorality; it veils the shameful results of its wickedness, and stones those who, for indignant pity, expose them. How often will Divinity descend to enlighten the dark places of the earth? How often will the Long-suffering replenish from Himself the exhausted springs of love? How much longer will it be ere the dread dream of the old Seers is realized, and the world is burnt up with its own hellish, smouldering fires!"

After a short bright summer, the autumn came damp and chill. The Sundays were seldom fine enough for pleasant walks, so Challoner used to bring his fair friend to our house pretty regu-

larly, and once or twice, at rare intervals, she came in the week for an hour. Gradually I began quite to look forward to these visits, for I had early been forbidden to absent myself entirely from her society. Challoner had said very earnestly, "You must not, indeed, for many reasons,—above all, because Helen has a nervous dread of any change that might lead to communication with Sir Julian; and while she continues in this mood I—"

The sentence was not finished in words; a flush of hot, eloquent blood into the beautiful young face, a tight folding of the arms across the full, throbbing heart, made the remainder unnecessary.

Also I had been requested not to address Lady Temple by any other than her Christian name. In those touching tones of hers that used to be raised in her girlish energy into sudden echoing music, then die away like a sigh, she exclaimed one day, "I hate to be called Lady Temple, it makes me shudder, and yet, and yet, dear love, it is right for me to be reminded—" All this

last in a whisper, with a wistful, shy glance into Challoner's face. Most surely the love passages here were unique, and I find words very weak and insufficient to describe even as much as I saw of the mutual feelings of this strange pair,—the mixture of hot love and pride and pain with which Challoner regarded his Helen; her clinging, adoring affection for him, a something jealous and monopolizing in it withal, and a hint of an element that would show her as a tigress to any one who should dare to come between them. Even thus early in their love I saw something of this.

It was about this time that two conversations took place between us that impressed themselves as characteristic upon my memory. The first came about in this wise. One day Challoner brought some fine engravings of celebrated pictures to show Helen, upon which I asked her if she cared for art.

She replied that she had an exceeding love for it, but no knowledge of it, adding deprecatingly, "or I should not have made the idiotic mistake I did in the studio just now."

Said Challoner to me, answering her look, “Helen mistook the sex of one of my studies of heads, but that shows no particular ignorance,—the most loving and trustworthy of one of our present art-critics confesses his inability to decide the sex of a design he mentions by Giorgione, and puts it down as being of an age just before that at which ‘the ways of loveliness divide.’ Helen admired my boy’s head, and thought it was a girl’s; it is natural to make beauty feminine.”

“No, no,” she murmured, caressing the hand she held; “I know that beauty is not always feminine.”

He passed his arm round her waist, and drew her down to sit beside him on the sofa. (I used to think it rather cool of them to ask me to stay with them, and then constantly forget my presence, or act as if they did.) Challoner continued, “Angels and children, besides, are privileged to confound the sexes; it is a matter of such supreme indifference to them. I must tell

you two funny stories à propos of that. One summer day I offered to take a little boy I knew, to bathe with me in the river near his home. ‘Take me, too,’ exclaimed his sister, aged nine years, ‘and let us all bathe, and all be *nymphs*!’

“Two years before that she had been to see a friend’s baby,—a new arrival,—and, meeting me, she began to dilate on the important topic. I asked, Is it a boy or a girl? She answered with contemptuous dignity, ‘Why, haven’t I told you it’s not a boy or a girl,—it’s a *baby*.’”

Was it the subject, or the light, passing touches of Challoner’s chestnut curls that brought such a brilliant carmine into Helen’s fair face? When, a few minutes after, he chose to turn round and press his lips upon her little shell-like ear, apparently to whisper, I found the room getting too warm, and retired to my own.

Very different was the second conversation I recall. I think it was about a fortnight later, that one Sunday afternoon I went into the studio, and found my turtle-doves sitting together, Chal-

loner with one hand on a large open book upon his knee, the other round Helen's waist. She, in his own favourite attitude, with her clasped hands upon his shoulder, and her head resting on them. When I entered the room she raised herself, and gently moved Challoner's arm from her waist, keeping his hand between her own though, to still the murmuring that rose to his lips.

He said to me, "We have been reading the reign of Manasseh, in the 33rd chapter of the 2nd Book of Chronicles. It is very interesting ; and I think the records of all those kings has a certain fascination, not in the royalty itself, for, as far as our modern kings and queens are concerned, I believe the sooner they all give up the burdens of their crowns the better both for their peoples and themselves ; but these Israelitish monarchs were of the people, invested with a real power and held strictly accountable for it. If they did their duty, it went well with them ; if they failed, they were dealt with in summary fashion. See here,—' Now, after the time that

Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish, but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there. And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.' Here is a stern record ; the broad light of history and experience supplies the amply sufficient comment. Kingcraft and cobblers have but one rule before the Supreme Justice ; the unprofitable servant must be swept away, he shall not cumber the ground ; as men sow, they reap."

Helen said softly, "But, dear Edmond, is it not something like reading fairy-tales to read these stories ? If they are true, heaven must have been much nearer earth in those old days than now. God himself taught men then."

Challoner asked, "And now my Helen ?"

She raised her grave sweet eyes sadly for all answer.

He continued : "In these later days does no spirit bear witness with our spirit for truth and

right? Has the Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world according to Gospel love, quite faded out? One says, 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock.' If we cannot open the door and let in the glorious guest, if we will have seven devils rather, shall we, rejecting the indwelling Divinity, refusing to believe in the Immortality, cry against heaven that it has forsaken us?"

Helen turned to him, and with a sudden, passionate gesture, threw her arms round his neck, and hid her face in his breast. It was the impulse of the loving heart, long troubled by an elaborate theology and a worldly training, all at once finding faith and rest with her love.

I looked silently out into the street as long as I reasonably could, and then I remarked, "Challoner, I, too, find those histories you like so much, sad and unsatisfactory. I'll tell you why. How often is it written,—now the rest of the acts of this and another,—'and all that he did, and the ivory house that he made, and all the cities

that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel,' or Judah, or somewhere? And they are, but what of it? If these men, with their exceptional powers, with the cities that they made, and the ivory palaces, have passed away, leaving so slight a mark, of what account are our little lives, our paintings, our writings? Verily, everything is altogether vanity!"

"*Halte là!*!" exclaimed Challoner, with a smile; "at least, you shall not revile Art. It is written, 'Out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad.' Can any work be said to have failed that has made glad one sweet life? But Helen is looking at my watch. Must my dear one leave us? Oh, envious time!"

It is certainly idle to talk of inspiration or prophecy having ceased on the earth; genius is direct inspiration, like the typical Melchisedec, without father, without mother, and without descent. No special gift of prophecy was needed though, in those days of which I speak, to feel

the coming disturbance in the horizon. Life with my dear friends was now so sweet that it must needs be sweeter, or very bitter. But the first breath that ruffled came from the outer world, and in this manner.

Challoner had lately taken up again a picture commenced in the country, and laid aside for what he called more serious work. Just now, with brain and heart too full to make new designs, but "a necessity for occupation" (he had emphatically added) "it would do as well as anything else to work on;" and with work came a deepening interest, and then inevitably the glow from his own spirit of grace and beauty spread gradually over the canvas.

The subject was a simple rural one. Two little boys bathing in the clear pool of a quiet little stream had been evidently disturbed by cattle coming to drink, and having run to a pebbly shallow in the middle, were clinging helplessly to each other, and anxiously watching the coming of a girl of about fifteen or sixteen to their as-

sistance ; she, stepping cautiously, devoting more care though to the saving of her garments from the water than to any concealment of her shapely limbs in the lonely spot. Her unconscious grace, her tender, reassuring smile to the frightened children had been rendered in Challoner's happiest manner ; but the striking point in the picture was the two boys—the round, alarmed little faces pressed close together ; the white, wet, glistening bodies, with fat arms intertwined, had touches in them of rarest beauty. Carefully and successfully, too, had the cattle been painted, with their great full eyes and wondering faces, while the clear stream and sheltering trees were in themselves thoughts of joy.

Challoner was working on the boys, and had sent for me to note the effect of a slight alteration he had made in their attitudes, when a card was brought to him, with a polite request for an interview.

“ Lord de Vaux,” he read out ; and continued, “ be prepared, Walsingham, to do the honours ;

I am not in the humour for distinguished strangers." Then, to the children, "And you, my cherubs, must don your fig-leaves. I may be stopped for ever so long, and you will catch cold."

Lord de Vaux was a pleasant-looking young man, and he commenced with an ingratiating directness.

"Mr. Challoner, I am very anxious to possess one of your beautiful pictures. May I look at what you are at present engaged on?"

"Certainly," said Challoner, moving away.

But Lord de Vaux was evidently disappointed with his inspection. He remarked hesitating, "This is a very fine painting, of course, something wonderfully fresh and sweet and life-like about it, but the fact is, Mr. Challoner, that to me the most beautiful thing in a picture, as in life, is a beautiful woman,—have you no pictures of that sort in hand now?"

Challoner answered, with a slight gesture of impatience, "No, my lord, and I don't paint to

order,—I can't do it. Allow me to give you one or two addresses in Paris where you can have an almost unlimited choice of the sort you desire."

"Come, come, that's not fair," returned the peer, good-humouredly; "I don't merely want a picture of a beautiful woman, draped or otherwise (rather otherwise), but I want one of *your* women,—one of those wonderful pictures of which the lines are all grace, and the beauty of a sort that stays,—a picture to look at for hours and be the happier for possessing. Let me be candid, Mr. Challoner; I heard that you were painting one that I thought would just suit me—a specimen of womanhood more glorious than even you have yet given the world,—and I wished to be first in the field for it. It must have been a mistake, and yet the very model was pointed out to me—a splendid creature!"

"My lord!" exclaimed Challoner, with rising colour.

"Yes, that—lady you were walking with last Sunday."

Challoner raised his hand, gave me an imploring look, and rushed out of the room.

“What the d— is the matter?—what have I said?” cried Lord de Vaux. “I am sure I meant anything but to give offence, and the—the lady cannot be very much to him,—why, I was told she was a servant.”

I answered, “She is not his model, at any rate, nor any one else’s, nor one to be lightly spoken of. You will oblige Mr. Challoner and me much by stopping as far as possible any gossip respecting her.”

He replied readily, “Then I will, I am sure; in return will you kindly remember my wishes if he should paint again the sort of picture I want?” and with that he took up his hat, wished me good-morning, and departed.

Challoner was very silent and thoughtful all the evening after this visit, only just as I was going to wish him good-night did he seem at all inclined to unburden himself. Then he

began, with suddenly kindling eyes, “Walsingham, I am sure you must agree with me that it is time to take some decisive steps when men like Lord de Vaux begin to talk of Helen.”

“Certainly,” I replied; “I have even wondered that they have not been taken before.”

He rejoined earnestly, “They would have been if, unfortunately, the only plan I can think of were not so distasteful to Helen.”

“To Helen!” I repeated. “I am surprised. She is certainly not one whom I should have accused of ‘the virtue of the cheaply virtuous, who pride themselves on senselessness and frost,’ as the divine Shelley has it.”

Challoner stopped me with an angry grasp of my arm. “You don’t understand,” he exclaimed, “and you are misjudging us both. I wish to see or write to Sir Julian Temple; he must naturally desire to be released from a wife who will never under any conditions return to him, and it is at least due to him to have fair warning to save his name and honour by getting legally released, if that is possible.”

"And if it is not possible, as I rather fancy?"
I asked.

He answered, "Then at least I shall have done to him as I would be done by in a like case. He will have an opportunity of making a last appeal or some arrangement with his wife, and whatever I do afterwards will not be like the act of a thief in the night. Walsingham, I must take my Helen in the face of day, before all men, or I will die of my deep love rather than touch her. But, before I communicate with Sir Julian, I want Helen to go to my parents. They would be good and loving to her for my sake, and her being with them would have a double advantage. It would be an assurance to the world of my true love and entirely honest intentions towards her, and they would carefully protect her from any unreasonable interference from Sir Julian,—not that I believe he would attempt any, his apathy hitherto makes that improbable; besides, it is hardly likely he would arm public opinion against himself by persecution or an appeal to force,—if he

should, shall not I be watching? Could I suffer it?"

I asked, "And what are Helen's objections to all this?"

He replied, "In the first place, she shrinks from any further communication of any kind with her husband; oh, Walsingham, that sweet heart has suffered cruelly from that man, or such a feeling of hate and dread of him as she has could never have arisen; she cannot realize any obligation towards him from herself, but if my feelings of right and honour, as man to man, she says, cannot be satisfied without a reference to him, she will meet him where she is or —" he hesitated.

"Or under your protection," I continued. "That feeling is not difficult to understand. Women are both timid and practical; she will feel safer with you in all ways, and then Sir Julian will more surely and easily obtain a divorce."

"But, Walsingham, it will not be right,—not

good even for her,—don't tempt me with the thought of it; besides, I have not yet told you her motive in limiting herself to these two alternatives,” resumed Challoner passionately.

“ What can it be but her love ?” I rejoined.

He answered, “ It is at least as much her *hate*. Her servitude or her faithlessness would be galling to Sir Julian's pride, therefore she persists in one or the other. But, Walsingham, before you judge, before you dare to blame her, even in your own heart, think how she has been brought up,—by precepts without principle, in a religion without life, in the practical worship of nothing but purple and gold — ”

“ Scorning which,” I interrupted, “ she has become what she is—an adorable heathen !”

Repeated Challoner, “ Adorable ! ay, how torturingly adorable even you don't know, cannot know. One thing is certain,—I cannot stand the present state of affairs much longer ;” and, after walking rapidly up and down the room a few times, he abruptly bade me good-night.

Two days later Challoner actually wrote his proposed letter, and directed it to Sir Julian's country-seat. Helen thought that he was travelling on the Continent, but said that the house-keeper would be sure to forward it. On the same day that the letter was dispatched, Challoner took me by surprise by asking me to be a witness to his will, which I found had been drawn up in due form by a lawyer, and by which he left everything he possessed unconditionally to Helen, earnestly recommending her to his parents, to be taken by them in his place in the event of his death.

"Life is uncertain," he remarked quietly, "and my Helen's position so peculiar. I wish to secure her what I can, although she is so proud of her independence. I have not much to leave yet, as you know, but I am going to work hard to make it more. I'll try, I think, even to paint pictures to order," he added with a smile.

A week passed and then another, but no answer came from Sir Julian, and still Helen remained the distinguished parlour-maid at the

Tollers, evidently persistent in her desire to wound her husband's pride, notwithstanding her newly found faith; universal charity, patience, and forbearance are virtues of slow growth. By way of compounding for her obstinacy, she disarmed Challoner by devotion and tenderness so distracting even to witness, as cruelly to increase his trial.

In fact, the aspect of affairs was altogether most disheartening, and they seemed to reach their climax when, about three weeks after the signing of the will, Challoner fell seriously ill. A night of burning fever had been succeeded by complete prostration, and later in the day he had fallen into a restless sleep, when a note arrived from Helen. Not choosing to disturb him, I sent back her messenger, with a few lines from myself, telling her of his state. In the evening he was better, but still so inclined to be feverish that his doctor left word that he was to be kept as quiet as possible, and discouraged even from talking; so I gave him a book and went to sit by



myself in our common sitting-room, leaving the door, which led from his room into this, open between us. His bedroom had also another door opening on to the landing.

About nine o'clock, I was surprised by hearing a knock at the front door, a light step on the stairs, and then the sudden vision of Helen. I laid my finger on my lip and pointed to Challoner's open door.

She made anxious inquiries about the particulars of his illness, then told me rapidly that Mr. and Mrs. Toller were gone to the theatre, and had desired her to sit up for them; that, pleading her anxiety about a friend who was ill, she had prevailed upon the under housemaid to take her place for a short time, and that she was to be let in quietly, if only she returned home before eleven o'clock. So you will let me see Edmond," she pleaded, unconsciously raising her whisper into a wail, "and remind me of the time if I forget."

The sound at once caught Challoner's quick

ear. "Helen, love," he called, and she flew to him, shutting the door behind her.

I was vexed, first, because the excitement of her presence was the worst possible for the patient; also, because the thought had come into my head to seize that opportunity to give her a lecture that I felt she richly deserved. She was habitually reserved with me, but she could be impetuously frank on occasion.

I had determined to emulate this frankness. Since that conversation with Challoner, which had thrown such curious light upon her character, I had observed, and gained much more. I had called her, almost at random, an adorable heathen. I was more inclined now to look upon her as one of those fatal enchantresses of old who, for mere selfish passion, lured men to their destruction.

As long as men claim to be the superior sex, of greater power every way, of stronger intellect, they must bear the greater blame, and take the responsibility of all immorality; the startling

fact remains, that they are constantly not as much to blame as the woman with whom they sin. If her passions are not so strong, her perceptions are very fine; once having learnt the strength of men's, she acquires a surpassing facility in addressing herself to them, and works them, with a fatal power, for any ends she may have in view.

Challoner believed that Helen remained in her menial position, partly to gall Sir Julian, partly from her love of independence. I suspected there was a third reason stronger than all; this was, that, steel himself as he might against the feeling, Challoner, *she knew*, also disliked her position, and that, therefore, it brought nearer that other alternative, which was the dominant desire of her life. She was impatient to be taken to her lover's heart, knowing full well that once there, no bonds of church or state would shelter more safely than his honour and his faith.

She was naturally clever and quick-witted, but her energy was more exceptional than her in-

tellect. Hating Sir Julian at first with silent sullenness, her feelings had deepened until action, to a temperament like hers, became necessity. Her love for Challoner, dating, she declared, from the first time she saw him, had at first been but a brooding fancy, hopeless and helpless. Had he been an ordinary man, she would have inevitably led him away, dominated, and then utterly despised him.

Too strong for the common weak training of her sex, too clear-headed to believe that obedience and submission are the only virtues proper to woman, Helen Temple had practically thrown off all rules and obligations, and guided herself simply by her interests and her affections.

Now, these are no bad guides in the long-run ; but, unfortunately, we bring up our women in such ignorance, calling it innocence, that they cannot tell, till too late, what are their true interests in many cases. Let me be just. I saw poor Helen like a rudderless ship, longing for a sure guide and a haven. I believe that, besides

her passionate love, she saw in Challoner the one man who could save her; the one divine influence that could chase away all mists and storms from her, and make her "love all love." She had no tenderness for mere romance; no conception of principle. She could not believe fairy tales, but she believed *him*; wished to be taught by him. And yet even towards him, and here was what I could not get over, she was acting with an infernal selfishness.

Knowing the objections of his upright soul to any but innocent intercourse with her, she yet worked upon his feelings in every way to try and overcome his control over them; and the idea of separating herself from the chances of doing so, even by going to his parents, was intolerable to her. Granting she knew little of the world, and how entirely her wishes were against both their interests in it, she ought at least to have respected his sense of right.

Poor Challoner had called her "torturingly adorable;" did he, or did he not realize that she,

a married woman, was utterly without excuse for it.

Revolving all these things in my mind, I had worked myself into such extreme indignation that I was seriously thinking of opening that ominously closed door, and delivering my friend from the witchery. Had she been a woman of honest mind, I reflected, she would not have shut the door in that manner; it is the first time she has ever entered Challoner's bedroom (to my knowledge), and she would naturally have done it timidly, leaving the door carefully wide open; and even if he had afterwards asked her to shut it, she would have done it coyly, making some shy excuse to me. Just as I had come to this decision the clock struck ten, and there was a knock at the house door simultaneously. A few minutes later there were heavy steps on the stairs, and some one stopped, not at the sitting-room door but at Challoner's bedroom.

A moment sufficed for me to reflect that even Helen would sooner brook my sudden entrance

there than a stranger, and darting to the door I burst it open, exactly at the same moment that the one from the landing was also opened by Sir Julian Temple.

His wife sat on Challoner's bed, leaning over him, almost as a mother might over her child, her arms twined about him, her head upon his pillow, her lips touching his forehead. On the opening of the doors she raised herself with a slight, impatient start; then casting a sudden glance of hate and bitter scorn at Sir Julian, such as I hope I may never see again on any face, man or woman's, she turned again to Challoner, and with a quick, impetuous movement, she passed her arms again round him, and strained him to her breast with such passionate force, that she literally lifted him from his bed. Then resigning him gently, she turned deliberately round, and faced her husband.

He had stood fairly aghast at the scene; and as for Challoner, I think Helen had pressed all his breath away. There was a full minute of

profound silence, then Sir Julian said, "At length we meet, Lady Temple."

She looked him over calmly from head to foot, but answered never a word. Then Challoner made an effort to raise himself, and opened his lips, but before he had time to speak Sir Julian had turned away, and in another minute he had walked out of the house.

We were all silent for awhile; then Challoner said, "Walsingham, you must take Helen home."

She turned to me with a certain imperial gesture of dismissal; then, as I almost involuntarily moved to obey her, she threw herself upon his neck, and murmured, "Oh, Edmond, my home is here, you must not send me away."

He folded his arms about her; but in another moment he was gasping for breath, and called for me. His lips were quite blue, and I well knew what was the matter. He was subject to violent palpitation of the heart, and I had to give him a strong dose of sal volatile.

As he lay with closed eyes, quite still and

silent, I whispered to Helen sternly (for I felt furiously angry with her), "Now, Lady Temple, the sooner you make ready to go away the better; Challoner is not equal to any more scenes."

For all answer she raised her flushed face, streaming with heavy silent tears. My heart melted within me. I can stand hysterics unmoved, but not silent tears. After all, how she loved him! Another minute, and Challoner again opened his full sweet eyes, and stretched out his hand for hers. She was frightened now, and bent over him trembling.

He said, "My darling, you must leave me. I will come for you myself to-morrow. You must say that it is urgently necessary for you to quit that place, and I will take you at once to my mother. My Helen, it *is* urgently, absolutely necessary; but soon, oh! very soon now, my life, I shall be able to claim you for my own before all the world for my wife. Dear love, good night!"

She pressed her lips on his in an eager cling-

ing way, as if she could not have enough of the sweetness without, and went away. I waited a few minutes to make arrangements for all Challoner's possible requirements during my absence, and then followed her. She was sitting at the foot of the stairs, crying again bitterly. I reminded her that it was getting late, and that we should have to hasten.

She replied, passionately, "I don't wish to go away. I would rather lie like a dog outside Edmond's door all night than be sent away like this. I care nothing for the world and its opinion ; why does he ?"

I said, "He cares for your honour and his own, and even Sir Julian's ; besides, you forget what he wrote to him."

She exclaimed, stamping her foot and clenching her white hands, "I wish I had suffocated Sir Julian before I left him ! I wish—"

"Stop ! stop !" I cried ; "this is simple ravaging ; nothing but a mad excitement. Come, let us look for a cab. I must be back with our patient as soon as possible."

Of course Challoner was quite unable to go for his Helen the next morning. Very few people knew, as I did, the slight hold he had on life. "Doesn't think us worth staying long with," his doctor had remarked one day, with a quaint regretfulness, after regarding him very intently. On the present occasion, however, life seemed to have unusual attractions for him. Though he was not able to walk across the room without assistance, he insisted on dressing, and moving to the sofa in the sitting-room. Then I was dispatched for Helen, who was to have luncheon with us, and to start immediately after by train for the country, to the care of Challoner's parents. When I reached Kensington, I found all the household in a state of perturbation there. Indeed, with Sir Julian Temple's entrance into our quiet lives, a crowd of disturbers, from what Richter calls the "loud kingdom" of the world, seemed suddenly to be let loose upon us. Helen came to the door, flushed and frowning; the cook and housemaid were upon the staircase, and there was agitated walking about overhead.

Helen said, "Mrs. Toller refuses to let me go. I mean to come notwithstanding, of course; but, perhaps it will smooth matters if you will go and speak to her while I put on my bonnet." Then turning to one of the servants on the stairs she said, "Matty, tell the mistress this gentleman wishes to speak to her."

Following said Matty up to the drawing-room, I was rather amused by being thus announced,—

"If you please, ma'am, Helen's young man is here, and wishes to speak to you."

Taking a card out of my pocket, I amended, laying it before the lady, "Excuse me, your servant makes a slight mistake. I am not Lady Temp—Miss Harding's 'young man,' but I come from a friend of hers, and as it is urgently needed that she should accompany me away from this, sorry she is to inconvenience you, I must take her at once."

Mrs. Toller rose (I fancy to avoid the necessity of offering me a seat), and answered haughtily, "Perhaps you will be good enough first to tell

me the name of her friend, and why her presence is required in such haste?"

I replied, "I am sorry that at present I am not at liberty to answer either question."

Mrs. Toller rejoined vehemently, "Then neither will I consent to let her leave me in this manner, nor will I cease putting obstacles in the way of a young woman only just one-and-twenty, and hitherto innocent, being taken from here to a life of infamy!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "what can you mean?"

She continued hurriedly, "I mean, that I know everything. Helen Harding has been with us for two years, and notwithstanding some faults of temper, she has proved a valuable servant; and though she has often attracted notice from her good looks, she has been very steady in her conduct. Some weeks ago I was aware she had at last chosen a *follower*, as they call it; but I had still no cause to be angry with her. Only yesterday my husband learnt that Helen's fol-

lower was a gentleman—in fact, young Mr. Challoner, the well-known artist; also, that Mr. Challoner had been suddenly taken ill. We can, therefore, perfectly understand the present move, and how the poor girl's feelings are now worked upon."

I remarked, "May I ask if you have told all this to Helen? and what she has answered?"

She rejoined scornfully, "Oh, you need not fear. Well instructed, no doubt, she wraps herself in impenetrable reserve on the subject; but, at least, she denies nothing."

"Then," I said, "it is my duty to Mr. Challoner to deny his acting as a seducer, or the possibility of his doing so, to any woman in the world; and I further pledge my honour as a gentleman that no one is acting any such part towards the—the lady whom you know as Helen Harding."

"The lady!" she repeated; "then Helen was born a lady? My husband was right in his surmise. Pray let us know—"

I answered, "I am sorry that I am really much

pressed for time," and hurrying downstairs, I helped Helen into my cab, and drove off.

When we arrived at home we found the doctor sitting with Challoner. He was an intimate friend, and seemed surprised at not having Helen introduced to him; but only remarked coolly, "I didn't know you expected ladies; now I see the meaning of the toilette."

Helen sat down shyly by the patient, and murmured, "I am so glad to see you up, Edmond; but do you really feel equal to the journey by-and-by?"

"Journey!" interrupted the doctor; "he is not going to undertake any journey for the next fortnight, I assure you. If he attempts any such thing, I shall certainly have him locked up in the nearest lunatic asylum!"

"Really, Doctor Duff," pleaded Challoner, "I cannot see how sitting a few hours in a train can possibly hurt me."

"I dare say not, my dear boy," answered the doctor, "but I do; that's enough. I can't see how

to paint pictures, but you do ; you understand *your* trade, I understand mine. That young lady may not have any reason for wishing to keep you alive, I have ; you have promised to paint me a picture, you know."

"Then you must go with Helen, Walsingham," Challoner said to me. And while we were arranging this (much, as I could see, to Helen's disgust), I observed Dr. Duff take out his spectacles, and putting them on, make a very close scrutiny of her face. At the first opportunity, he said very deliberately, "I surely cannot be mistaken, I believe I have the honour of addressing Lady Temple ? "

Helen quivered, coloured, and looked appealingly at Challoner. He took her hand protectingly, and answered for her, " You are right ; this is Lady Temple."

There was a pause. Dr. Duff raised his eyebrows, fidgeted with his watch for a few minutes, then got up, and wished us all good-bye, adding, "Challoner, I shall be passing here to-night, and

shall look in again ; but mind what I say, I'm serious, if you dare to move out without my permission, I'll put you under lock and key, if not in a lunatic asylum, in my own house. And about the picture, suppose you work out a new rendering of the ‘Mysteries of Udolpho,’ with her ladyship here for the centre figure.” And without waiting for an answer, he hurried off.

I duly took Helen into the country that afternoon, and she was most kindly received by Captain and Mrs. Challoner.

I must say, I wondered very much how she would get on there ; but, for some time, I had no opportunity of judging. She wrote to her beloved every day ; but he never made any remark on her letters, though his answers seemed to require much thought and time. Meanwhile, we were disturbed by a most unusual number of visitors, who had an ominous curiosity, and asked many questions, all bearing, directly or indirectly, upon Helen. Challoner, always retiring, and painfully sensitive, constantly echoing Shel-

ley's experience, "that the ebb and flow of the world vexed him," found this almost unendurable. The reason soon appeared, in the shape of a notice from Sir Julian Temple's lawyer, summoning him as co-respondent in the case of Temple *versus* Temple and Challoner, that would be brought almost immediately before the Divorce Court.

Challoner regarded the document with speechless disgust for some time, then he exclaimed, "Could you have conceived any proceeding so vile?"

"Upon my word," I answered, "I am not much surprised, considering all things. What did you expect?"

He replied, "I expected that Sir Julian would proceed against his wife for desertion, and for continued refusal to return to him, and would apply for a divorce on these just grounds; and if the present state of the law does not recognize this situation, that he would release her by private arrangement; she, in return for his promise

of non-interference, binding herself to give up his name, and all legal claim upon him. I certainly had no reason to expect, after my written assurance to him that there had been no criminal intercourse between us, that he would drag Helen's fair fame, my honour and his own, through the mire by such a charge."

"But, Challoner, reflect," I said; "he came here three weeks after your letter was written, unavoidably detained perhaps, and he finds his wife in your arms."

Challoner bit his lips, and was silent a minute; then he answered, "Yet you know that the circumstances were not criminating, whatever that fact seems to say; even if they had been, would not a just man have 'put her away privily,' the other count failing; only, if it did fail, it would be a proof that the Divorce Court insists upon actual vice before it gives any relief; rather a startling contradiction to the doctrine that laws are instituted 'for the punishment of wickedness and vice, and the maintenance of true religion and virtue.'"

I said, “I suppose the fact is, that Sir Julian is determined to have a divorce, and is therefore determined to make his case as strong as possible. At least, it will secure your being able to marry Helen.”

Challoner replied, “*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.* In no case would the law forbid my giving her my name, nor securing my property to any children we might have; in the present state of society there would be some social disadvantages. When people commence life by a false step, they naturally suffer from it some way or other; but, at least, this would be preferable to the present impending scandal and notoriety, which is degrading and all but unbearable.”

I pursued, “But, Challoner, are you justified in rejecting the religious view of the question; are you quite sure there is no religious objection to people living together as man and wife without the sanction of the church?”

He answered, “A State Church can only sanction what comes within the limits of the law; if

your convictions are against appealing to the latter, you are compelled to do without the aid of the former. As far as the spiritual aspect of it is concerned, listen to this" (and he took up a Bible, and read from St. Matthew xxii.), "'The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.' Surely this is conclusive, from the best

authority, that marriage is in no manner a spiritual question."

"Stay a moment," I rejoined, "what do you make of the text 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder'?"

"That God has not joined my Helen to Sir Julian Temple. It is an allusion to a spiritual relation that was certainly not in that bond," he replied quickly, and then throwing open the window as if to get as much air as possible upon this choking trouble of his, and looking out wearily upon the busy passers by, he continued, "Oh, how I wish Helen and I could fly away, far away, and be at rest!"

I asked, "And what prevents you? you would, by going away, avoid the trial altogether, at least, appearing at it."

"Yes," he rejoined with sparkling eyes, "and return to be the degraded man, among my fellows, that an adulterer and a thief deserves to be." After a short silence, he resumed, "*L'ami*, you must go with me to Sir Julian's lawyer tomorrow, I want to speak to him."

"Very well," I answered, "I'll go, but before we drop this subject, I wish to present one more view of it to you. Admitting that you are right as regards your own position, what about Sir Julian's? Unless he can get a divorce from his wife, remember he cannot marry again, and he may desire a direct heir to his title, an advantage only to be gained from a legal marriage."

"And the importance of his title is to be set against this gross violation of all manly and Christian feeling, in bringing his most intimate personal affairs before the public, and handing over his young wife, but lately held to his heart as nearest and dearest of all the world, to be judged by a crowd of indifferent men. *Allons, mon ami*, let us drop this odious topic; until marriage returns to its original position, as simply a personal or family arrangement, from which it only emerged in the eighth century, there will be no end to the troubles of it. Personal affections and interests are the safest guides for such a matter; it is passing strange there should be such a dread of trusting to them.

The next day we went to the lawyer, and Challoner taking the summons from his pocket dashed it down on the table before him, and asked why that thing was sent him ?

"Take a seat, Mr. Challoner," said the lawyer politely.

"I want to know," continued Challoner, taking no notice of the equivocal courtesy, "if Sir Julian pretends to believe that I am really guilty, and I desire that he may be informed that I here assert, on my word of honour as a gentleman, that I am not, and that I defy him to prove it."

Answered the lawyer soothingly, "Oh, pray don't disturb yourself, Sir; we shall not attempt to prove it."

"Then in Heaven's name what do you mean by summoning me?"

"Well, really," replied the official, smoothing his chin, "that must be considered as strictly our own affair."

Said Challoner, "Then I have only one more duty in the matter, and that is, to make one last

appeal to Sir Julian Temple, through you, to spare his wife this insult, me this shame, himself this gratuitous dishonour."

"It shall certainly be conveyed to him," responded the lawyer, bowing low, as we hereupon left the office.

The appeal was of no effect; the day appointed for the trial approached, and meantime the affair had become one of unprecedented notoriety.

Lithographs of Challoner's picture of "In Purple and Gold," suddenly appeared in all the booksellers' windows. Three photographers applied to him for sittings for his portrait, and though he refused them all with a *sauvagerie* quite foreign to his character, innumerable likenesses of him stared one in the face in every street.

One day, walking into a stationer's shop, I heard a lady exclaim, after an earnest examination of one, "Who would have expected that a man with such an angel face could be the correspondent in a criminal trial? Lady Temple

must be handsome, still, her appearance does not strike one with the same astonishing unsuitableness with the position." I decided the speaker was a woman of discernment.

Next, mysterious paragraphs on the impending "interesting" case appeared in various newspapers. One actually had the audacity to present the following version of it:—

"A correspondent favours us with the subjoined romance of real life as a suggestion for our dramatizing poets and authors.

"Once upon a time, a certain artist, not unknown to fame, was asked to paint the likeness of a noble lady. He made a picture, also an impression. The husband's suspicions were roused, the artist bowed out, the picture declined. Slightly altered, this latter was presented to the public with a sensation title, and at once disposed of. Shortly after, the noble lady disappeared, and defied all search for two years. Suddenly, the bereaved husband falls upon her track, follows it up, and finds her in the arms of

her artist. Curtain falls upon this astonishing tableau."

Poor Challoner! I thought the world seemed bent on driving him mad; of all men, he shrank most carefully from any sort of notoriety at all times, and there were physical reasons why continued and extreme excitements were actually dangerous for him; yet here he was, innocent of crime to God or man, of stainless honour, of pure, sweet heart, arraigned before a law court for a sin which he had, with almost superhuman strength, resisted,—embroiled with newspaper editors, defied by photographers, sarcastically condoled with by his *confrères*, and stared out of countenance wherever he went by a mixed public, anxious to give and receive the latest account of the hero of the most piquant scandal of the day.

It was certainly fortunate that Helen was not in town. How Challoner managed to keep her away, and the sort of excitement that she was pleased to keep up for him, came to my know-

ledge in the following manner. He had been writing for some hours one morning, and complained of a violent headache. I recommended his going out into the air, and offered to help him with his correspondence. After some hesitation he picked out of a little heap a letter from a mutual friend, "on the topic of the hour," he said, with an impatient emphasis, and asked me to answer it.

I took it from his hand, and he went out. Now, the handwriting on the envelope was familiar to me; but the letter was in a lady's hand, quite different. There was neither the usual form of commencement, nor any signature. Partly taken by surprise, therefore, partly because I thought that my long and intimate friendship excused it, I read as follows:—

"I must add another sheet to tell you that your letter of yesterday has just arrived, and how happy its assurance has made me. My own love, if you insist on my continued absence from you, you must repeat it every day. I am standing

between heaven and hell, and it is so hard, so hard to keep my heart still. Last night a sudden storm arose, and your mother, knowing I always keep my window open, stole softly into my room to see if the rain came in. I sleep lightly, and starting upon her entrance, called involuntarily upon your name. She was so alarmed that she roused me, and coming to my bedside, she questioned me solemnly upon our relations towards each other. I could not help laughing as I told her that she of all women had least excuse for doubting your invincible virtue, and certainly had no cause; but she said my levity grieved her, so I asked her to forgive it, because my position made me feel so mad sometimes,—that dreadful chance (as I thought then) of my being forced to return to Sir Julian, in which case I should certainly strangle him or myself. But this hurt your mother still more to hear, and it was long before I could console her with the prospect of how subdued and good I should become when I lived with you—truly angelic, I told her,

by mere force of sympathy and example. Can that come true, darling? I am afraid not. I am not of the angel sort; but, at least, I shall cover myself with your wings, and look like one; and I shall wrap my heart up with your love so close and warm, that all alien meaner feelings must be stifled in time, and at least shall never be seen."

The next day Challoner told me that his father and mother were coming up with Helen for the trial, and that he had engaged rooms for them at the —— Hotel. They would not arrive till the day before, and the day after, he had arranged to leave town with Helen. That they intended to be married if they could be, otherwise they should go away without; also, that he thought of going to Henley-on-Thames, as he had a design to settle thereabouts. He was thoroughly disgusted with London; but it was inconvenient to be at too great a distance, and besides his parents fancied that locality, and might probably come and live near him there. Then he added, "Walsingham,

we agreed to drop that vexed question of the rightfulness or otherwise of divorce ; but I want you to listen to one more view of it, from a great authority, Wilhelm von Humboldt. He says, ‘ With contracts, which render personal performance a duty, or still more with those which produce peculiar personal relations, coercion operates hurtfully on man’s noblest powers. When, therefore, such a personal relation arises from the contract as not only to require certain single actions, but in the strictest sense to affect the person, and influence the whole manner of his existence, where that which is done or left undone is in the closest dependence on internal sensations, the option of separation *should always remain open*, and the step itself should not require any extenuating reasons. Thus it is with matrimony.’ ”

I answered, “ Quotations from German writers are always rather difficult to follow in a hurry ; but that sounds reasonable, and I should certainly be glad, as I am to be left alone, if I could find some independent and intelligent young lady

who would enter into such an open contract with me.

"It is certainly hard that either should run the risk of being wrecked for life in this matter, unless morals imperiously demand it; and there is no question that public morality suffers much now from matrimony having become for various reasons so inconvenient and so burdensome. Assuredly, in the present state of things, with my limited income and my precarious prospects, I cannot dare to dream of a wife, and how many there are in my position? By the bye, Challoner, have you engaged counsel?"

He answered, "No; I have thought of it, but there is really no occasion. Sir Julian can only bring against us a presumption of adultery. I cannot deny the opportunity, though it is my duty to Helen and to myself to deny the fact. I must attend the case throughout to watch that no false statements are made; but, since I disapprove of it *in toto*, and have framed my own future entirely independently of it, I have no further concern in it."

"And Helen?" I asked.

"Helen will have also to deny the imputation, but nothing more, I hope," he answered.

I pursued, always doubtful of her. "If you don't wish her to do more, of course you will desire her not."

He looked at me with a puzzled air, then answered, "I shall certainly advise her not; but Helen is an accountable and reasonable being. I cannot interfere with her further."

I could not help remarking, "Well, I suppose you wait till you are married, or, what you consider the same, till you assume your authority."

He rejoined, "Do women, then, cease to be reasonable and accountable when they are married? By the law, they are not accountable (at present) for their debts, therefore we must take our wives entirely into our confidence, and interest them in managing our household affairs for our mutual comfort; but we are not accountable for their souls,—their thoughts, convictions, and

affections are subject only to the same “perfect law of liberty” as our own. We cannot, in truth, coerce them ; if we attempt to do so, it is a mistake ; if we believe in our power, it is a delusion.”

It was the evening before the trial, and we went to the station to meet our travellers. Challoner looked round uneasily at the crowd ; we had good reason to suspect that a great number were not there simply on their own private affairs. The train arrived ; Captain Challoner got out first, and with his son assisted his wife ; then Challoner held out his hand for Helen. There was a sudden hush as she descended. I believe even the porters stood still to look at her. When she was beside him, he looked wistfully for a moment into her face ; then, lifting her gloved hand, he bowed his head, and pressed it to his lips.

We saw them off to the hotel, and then went to our club to dinner, promising to rejoin them

an hour later. Challoner could not eat a morsel, which was possibly the reason why he drank much more wine than usual.

When we reached the hotel he was flushed, excited, and restless. Helen was evidently in high spirits, and she looked radiantly lovely ; it was no wonder that his gaze rested on her, fascinated and triumphant. His mother had many tender inquiries to make of him respecting his health, his work, etc., and his father, too, had grave and anxious questions to put respecting the programme for the next day, and future movements ; but poor Challoner could not attend, much less converse. After several valiant attempts, he pleaded a headache, and escaped to Helen's side on the sofa.

How her eyes sparkled as she marked his hands trembling to embrace her, his lips quivering for a kiss ! I hated her for it. Was it possible that she was dreaming that there was yet an opportunity of annihilating the one chance that Sir Julian or the law might have of delaying her

union with her lover, if they were to plead not guilty ? I could not help accusing her of it, but Challoner had conscientiously avoided all criminal intercourse hitherto, and I vowed within myself that he should not be overcome now at the eleventh hour.

It was impossible to hold them in conversation ; he could not, Helen would not, converse with me. I was obliged to join Captain and Mrs. Challoner near the fire, but I kept watch. They, too, were uncomfortable ; besides the peculiarities of her position, I saw that they were personally not quite at ease with Helen, and had doubts that she could be in any case a suitable wife for their adored son.

“ To be his mistress is too much honour for her,” I reflected in my rage, as I watched her now, toying with his hand, casting down her eyes beneath his ardent gaze, bending her head till it almost touched his breast,—her attitude, her every movement eloquent of the *abandon* of tenderness, of languor, of silent rapture.

Some half-hour or so elapsed, then a few words passed between them. There was apparently a slight hesitation on Helen's part,—a look of triumph, then of misgiving floated over her gloriously beautiful, seducing face. Another moment and she had risen noiselessly and was walking towards the door, closely followed by Challoner. I jumped up, and with three steps placed myself before it. "Challoner," I exclaimed, "we have some business to get through when we get home to-night. I had forgotten, and it is already very late. Let us say good-night at once; I think we have all forgotten the time."

While I spoke I had seized my friend by the wrist, and held him with an iron grasp. One glance he darted at me of surprise and fury, but, meeting my look of calm reproach, his revulsion of feeling was instantaneous. The devil had crept into Challoner with the fumes of wine, but there was no room for him there,—with the first effort he was thrust out. He now echoed me bravely.

"Yes, Helen, Walsingham is right; we must go home. Good-bye, my life,—but only till to-morrow—only till to-morrow."

When we got out into the street I asked, "Shall we walk home, or are you tired?" He passed his arm through mine for all answer.

When we got home, he said, "*L'ami*, I'm tired now. Good-night."

I was tired, too, but I could not sleep. The extraordinary peril past, Helen's unparalleled perversity, Challoner's blind worship, his prospects with such a woman in the future, passed through and through my brain and pained me with wakeful wonder. At length a ray of light burst in. Was there not a Star of Galilee once, all brightness, all purity, Divinity unalloyed,—and had He not one special tenderness, and that for a woman who was a sinner?—a sinner, so called. What is sin? Can it have anything to do with Love, which is of divine birth, a free thing, rebellious only when imprisoned, unveiling itself defiantly only when we try to force upon it

a uniform which it cannot wear? Helen loved Challoner, and she found in herself no law to forbid his desire. When we held up to her, social restraints, laws of honour, mutual obligations, she practically replied, "But I was free born." In all ages of the world Love has thus from time to time defied all law. Shall this teach us nothing? Was it not nature and not sin that was in Helen indomitable? Life is full of mysteries—a series of unsolvable puzzles.

I slept late next morning, and dressed myself in haste, yet when I sought Challoner I found him with eyes still closed. I roused him gently, and his first waking word was "Helen."

The fashionable world of London was going to have a grand excitement, and the sun shone brilliantly for the great stir. At breakfast, I received a note from Mrs. Toller, informing me that both her husband and herself would be at the court, and would be delighted if they could be of any service to Lady Temple.

"Oh, of course," exclaimed Challoner, "all

the world goes to the court to-day. Now who's that at the door, I wonder?"

It was Dr. Duff, who appeared with an immense bottle of smelling-salts, which he informed us he had brought for his patient's use on the approaching trying occasion.

Challoner seized the bottle and dashed it into the fire.

"Come, come," said the Doctor, "we are really a great deal too much excited. When do your friends arrive? I hear there is to be a procession of artists to conduct you to the court."

"Anything else?" asked the patient grimly.

"Well yes, lots of things, every one is talking about it; but come, my dear boy, you take it too seriously. It's an awkward affair, certainly, monstrous awkward, but all's well that ends well; you must face it like a man. Life's short, my boy, very short, yet it's long enough to live down a graver scandal than this, if only we will take it quietly. I was near here, and couldn't forbear just looking in to see how we were feel-

ing," and the doctor drew out his stethoscope.

Challoner put it aside gently, "I am quite well, thank you, Doctor, only a little irritable, which you must forgive, I can't help it; there are times when a grasshopper is a burden."

About ten or twelve more people came, on one pretence or another, before we left the house.

The court was densely crowded when we arrived, and numbers more outside were trying to gain admittance.

Sir Julian Temple, dark and stern-looking, sat at some distance from us, and I saw him pointed out once or twice; but it was our own party that attracted the most flattering and, at the same time, most uncomfortable amount of attention.

Captain Challoner grew so nervous from it, that he kept rapping the floor with his stick, until I expected every moment that he would be called to order by the usher of the court.

His wife sat next him, dividing her anxious cares between him and her loved son, on whose arm her hand lovingly rested. His face, thanks to the photographers, was well known, and the wide white brow and hectic flush had bright eyes and opera-glasses centred upon them in most overpowering fashion.

Helen was not at first recognized; she sat a little back, between Captain Challoner and myself, very pale and collected, but oppressed looking, as if her husband's presence weighed upon her like an abiding pain.

The case for the prosecution was briefly stated as follows:—

Sir Julian Temple, it was said, did not wish to press heavily upon his wife, although he appealed confidently to the court for a divorce on account of her inexcusable desertion and her adultery. Helen raised her head at this, and there was a fierce glare in her eyes as they sought Sir Julian's.

The following narration was then given:—

Lady Temple had disappeared from her home about eight months after her marriage. There had been disagreements between her husband and herself, but nothing amounting to serious quarrelling, mere ebullitions of temper in fact, which Sir Julian had earnestly striven to smooth over with indulgence and liberality. All efforts to trace her failed, and Sir Julian had suffered tortures of anxiety for nearly two years, when he received tidings of her in a very extraordinary letter from the co-respondent, Mr. Challoner. Sir Julian had no acquaintance with Mr. Challoner, beyond having once seen him in his studio, which he had visited in the company of a mutual acquaintance. The letter stated that the writer had met Lady Temple, and had become deeply attached to her, and that as she had resolved never to return to her husband, he (Mr. Challoner) wished to marry her, if Sir Julian would procure a divorce on the plea of her desertion and refusal to return to him. That if a divorce were not procurable on these grounds, Lady

Temple was anxious to enter into a private arrangement to give up her husband's name, and all claim upon him, on the condition of his non-interference with her, and that the writer would also bind himself, in any manner that Sir Julian desired, to maintain her as his wife for the rest of her life. Sir Julian did not receive this letter for three weeks after it was written. He was travelling, and had desired his agents to keep all communications for him (not expecting any of importance) until his return to England. Directly he read it, near ten o'clock at night, he resolved to seek Mr. Challoner, and proceeded at once to the address given. He could not, for an instant, entertain the idea of giving up his wife to any man, but he was greatly relieved to hear of her safety, and believed the letter to have been written with a certain honesty. On arriving at Mr. Challoner's door, he was informed that that gentleman was ill, and unable to leave his bed. Sir Julian stated his business to be very urgent, and desired the servant (an un-

sophisticated-looking maid) to inquire if he could not see a visitor for a few minutes. The girl replied that she was sure he could do that, for in fact he had a visitor, a lady, at that very moment, she believed. Sir Julian's heart beat very quick ; he begged that Mr. Challoner's door might be pointed out to him, and that he might be allowed to find his own way to it. Under the circumstances he had some excuse, and the girl readily consented,—not accustomed, apparently, to much ceremony among Mr. Challoner's visitors. Gentlemen of the jury, my unhappy client opened the door to find his wife in the respondent's arms !”

There was a great sensation in the Court, and Helen started upon her feet, obliging me to use actual force to make her sit down again without interrupting the prosecutor, who, as soon as silence was restored, resumed :

“ That is to say, Lady Temple was sitting on the bed, leaning over Mr. Challoner, to meet his caresses. She raised herself upon the opening

of the door ; but, on Sir Julian showing himself, she was drawn down again, and insultingly held by the co-respondent in a shameless, close embrace. Sir Julian made one remark, ‘ At length we meet, Lady Temple ! ’ and turning on his heel, left the room and the house. He has not had any further communication with the respondent or the co-respondent, although he has been informed that the latter has called upon his lawyer, entreating that the trial might be abandoned, and some private arrangement effected. Gentlemen, I repeat, Sir Julian Temple has been cruelly deserted, insulted, and dishonoured ; he calls upon you to release him from his unhappy matrimonial engagements, and leaves entirely in your hands the amount of damages your sense of justice may think right to claim from the co-respondent, the whole of which will be immediately invested in charity. It is bare relief, not revenge, that is demanded by my deeply-wronged client.”

I have said that Helen was pale when she

entered the Court; but when she left her seat now there was a deep flush upon her cheeks, hot quick breaths panted up between her carmine lips, and a magnificent anger on her lowered brows. As she approached to face the Court, the gentlemen she passed all rose; the next moment every man in the building was on his feet, and a murmur went through the crowd of "In purple and gold!" Helen had on, in effect, a purple dress of some soft, gracefully-falling material—French merino, I think, but the only gold was on her braided hair. When she was asked if she were guilty or not guilty of desertion of her husband, she replied, "Guilty!" with a clear ringing defiance, flinging the word, as it were, at the audience. To the second question, guilty or not guilty of adultery, she answered in a lower key, in a tone with an echo in it, "Not guilty!"

There was a pause, then she slightly raised her hand, and said, "I wish to correct a mis-statement just now made by the prosecutor.

Mr. Challoner did not draw me down to embrace him on Sir Julian Temple's unwarrantable entrance into his sick-room. He is not capable of offering an insult to his bitterest enemy. I am ; the world has been bitter to me, and made me hard. I twined my arms round him, and pressed him to my heart, with deliberate purpose. I desired Sir Julian to be convinced that there was no possibility of my voluntary return to him. Gentlemen of the jury, I stand between heaven and hell, if you force me to return to Sir Julian I will strangle him or myself—I swear it!" and pulling off her wedding-ring (it was the first time I had noticed her wearing it), she flung it into the middle of the room with all her force, and walked back to her seat with a splendid grace.

Challoner was next called for ; and the crowd, eager for more excitement, evidently took it ill that, after answering " Not guilty " very firmly and distinctly, he went immediately back to his place.

The judge, in summing up, remarked that desertion having been acknowledged, and sufficient evidence (!) having been given of criminal intercourse, notwithstanding the denial of adultery by the respondent and co-respondent, the principal matter for the consideration of the jury was the amount of damages to be claimed from the co-respondent; in justice to whom, however, it would be right to remember, that he could not be said to have seduced a wife from her husband, seeing that Lady Temple had deserted Sir Julian before the intimacy commenced."

The jury were not long deliberating. They found the respondent guilty of desertion and adultery,—damages, one farthing! A deafening cheer outside greeted the announcement of the verdict. Of course, a complete divorce was pronounced, and we left the Court as soon as we could; but this last was no easy matter; the rush to see Helen was tremendous.

That night the young clergyman dined with us who had (conditionally) agreed to marry Chal-

loner the next day. We had been much associated with him, in the matter of some charities in which we were interested, and he loved Challoner, like every one who knew him. As we sat talking after dinner, he remarked, "Challoner, when I perform the service that I have promised for you to-morrow, it will pain me very much to think of your heathenish ideas on that subject ; they are the more unaccountable when contrasted with your living faith ; your pure spiritualism in every other direction."

He was answered earnestly, "Then let me prove to you that my ideas are not heathenish ; that, in truth, there is a deeper spiritualism in my convictions on this point than on any other. In the first place, never imagine, for a moment, that I object to a religious ceremony on the occasion of marriage. If ever praise, prayer, and blessing are of avail, they must be specially so at such a joyful, yet solemn and important, epoch of life. But I deny the right or advantage of either Church or State laying the burden of irre-

vocabulary on this step, for the following reasons :—marriage is an engagement entered into by two people for their greater happiness, from a belief that they will be happier living together than apart. The happiness depends upon their conduct either to other ; if the happiness, therefore, does not result, and they mutually agree to separate, they ought to be able to do so. The duty of witnesses to the engagement, and all outsiders, is merely to secure the fact of the separation, like the engagement, being by *mutual* agreement, and with a due regard to the interests of each, and any children there may be from the union. This is a rational view ; and depend upon it, wherever reason may fairly enter, the most rational will prove the most religious view.”

The clergyman replied, “But, my friend, it is written, That no man shall put away his wife save for adultery.”

Challoner raised his clear, sweet, truthful eyes.
“ Assuredly not,” he replied ; “ let us not be

fearful to go further yet, and say, he may forgive her even *that*, if he will, and they may both recover happiness; but think a moment, when people separate by mutual agreement, neither is *put away* the one by the other; the words you quote apply to an agreement entered into by two people and violated, there being no mutual consent. This is contrary to simple justice; therefore, of course, to religion."

There was a short silence; then the clergyman said, "Challoner, you are a very earnest and single-minded searcher for truth; therefore, your views are always worthy of serious consideration. I will put that reading by, to think over; but, meanwhile, remember that the Church, in her view of marriage, looks far beyond the mere contract entered into for interest or pleasure. Marriage should not be a mere union of body, but of soul and spirit. It is written, 'If two of you are agreed on earth touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father which is in heaven.' Now, if one prayer of two

united hearts be of such efficacy, what should their lives be but a sacrament? a means of unceasing grace. With such a view, the Church is constrained to call such a Witness that it is better that before Him men should not vow, than that they should vow and not pay."

"Yes," returned Challoner, with steadfast, inspired gaze, "and it is thus that the Church scares men, whose lives are barren for want of such grace, both from the Sacrament of Marriage, and from that other Sacrament—the blessed pledge of the eternal union between God and man. She makes the giving of that free grace conditional. We must come for it;* she has no pity for the fearful hearts hungry and thirsting for it in secret. So it is with marriage. In youth there comes a time to every heart when the yearning for sympathy and sexual love is so great that it must needs be satisfied in some

* The Church of Rome hands round the wafer to the WHOLE congregation; it can be taken or rejected unobserved. The custom of communicants coming to the Communion Table is probably a Protestant innovation.

sort. Nature says, marry ; but Church and State cry, beware ; we will tie you up hand and foot for life if you do ; whatever choice you now make, you abide by, if it bring you the torments of hell. By so doing, they knowingly wink at the sacrifice of virtue, and a hideous trade, destroying yearly, body and soul, hundreds of fair women. Men scared from marriage seek other relief. On the other hand, the encouragement of marriage, by giving every facility for separation by mutual consent, would inevitably lead to those early unions which must be the best, because they are the most natural safeguards of morality, and, therefore, of happiness. Separations would become actually rarer; young hearts grow together, and mould themselves to each other naturally. Shelley, our latest and sweetest light on Love, says :—

“ And such is Nature’s law divine, that those
Who grow together cannot choose but love.”

Mutual love covers the graces that are lacking, and warms into life the germs of every virtue ;

and then the fair children of its creation bind together more firmly than all their parents' interests and affections. Ah, believe me, it is not restriction we want, but more liberty, full liberty, more trust in God's free grace, more faith in man's capability of virtue. Let us leave off making vows to be good, and strive and pray more to become so. Let us labour to be perfect, because our Father in heaven is perfect, not from fear of damages to pay, nor even of hell fire."

The excessive fatigue from continued excitement made Challoner sleep late again next morning. I took care he should not be disturbed; and when he opened his eyes at ten o'clock, he had only just an hour for his toilette, breakfast, and drive to church. Literally he went to his marriage fresh from his long sleep and his bath, in the haste and delight of a child just commencing a new bright phase of existence in full strong faith, while we all around him trembled. Who was right? he in his confidence, or we in our fear? His bright idea of the power of love to

warm into life the germs of every virtue, gave me hope. At least Helen would not strangle *him*, unless accidentally from impetuous love ; but she was silent and coy as a stolen nun that morning.

They were married, and went away, and I did not hear from Challoner for more than a week ; then I received the following effusion :—

“ DEAR WALSINGHAM,—This, just to say I’m in the seventh heaven of happiness, and quite well. Helen denies the last assertion ; as I have not the least objection to being nursed by her to any extent, and even want an excuse for idleness, I don’t argue the point. It is rather pleasant having her little cool ear pressed upon my heart, to listen to its beating, instead of a hard stethoscope ; and I have discovered a better remedy for palpitation than sal volatile,—in fact, a cure.

“ Yours,

“ E. CHALLONER.”

Dr. Duff came eager for news, and I showed him this letter.

“ Dear boy, dear boy !” he exclaimed, wiping

his spectacles, “I am so glad he is happy, but of course he must be; that’s a queer girl he has married,—bad temper; but every one is good with Challoner, because he is good to every one. We hold our destinies more in our own hands than we suppose. As for his cure,—humph! we shall see.”

About three weeks later, Challoner asked me to come down and see the house they had taken, and were about to furnish. I went, and found him looking wonderfully well, and in gay spirits.

Before I left, I asked him what work he had in hand. He answered with a comic look of distress, “Ah, Walsingham, I knew you would come to that,—would touch the sore, would have the skeleton out of the cupboard; I can’t work, have lost the power, never look at a brush, have not even unpacked them; is it not dreadful? Here I am married, with only two hundred a year, and a lost art for a profession. Helen, my life, how could you be a party to such imprudence?”

She returned gaily, "Don't fear, darling, if you can't keep me I will keep you ; I will have a training establishment for housemaids, and they shall all wait upon my love for practice."

"No, that they shall not," he said ; "I will never give up my queen's dear hands for those of her serving-maids. When you take in housemaids we must have Walsingham also ; he will make a capital lay-figure for them."

And with such merry talk out of the fulness of their glad hearts, they chased away all our anxieties.

It was several months later in the long days again, when Challoner, who had recovered his "lost Art," sent for me to look at his design for a great typical picture of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, as the three Angels who stand with the glorious gifts of the millennium in their open hands, and grieve over the perverse and blinded generation who reject them.

"You are fairly at work now," I remarked.

He answered musingly, "Yes, and I would

like to be *hard* at work, but my tyrannical wife will not let me. My day will be short, and night will come soon. *L'ami*, I must tell you a secret, because I wish to give you a charge. When my little child comes, you must stand surety for it; so that when I leave it, you may take my duty of watchful care, and help my Helen to train it up in all love and faith and freedom."

"Challoner!" I exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this? You have been so well for some time past,—you are not suffering now?"

He replied quietly, "No, not suffering any way, very, very happy; yet I have a warning to keep my house in order,—to be ready,—not a shadow,—it is too light,—but stay, here is Helen, and we must not pain her. Sweetheart, come and look at me, I want to paint the light of your loving eyes."

Let me close this record with my last view of the principal actors in it, on that day. Their lives are too near heaven, too sacred now, to be laid open for idle curiosity. Already fair Helen had

left hell far behind when they came, hand in hand, to the gate to bid me good-bye, in the purple light of that summer evening. The world's sun had gone down, but the glow and grace of their true love kept an abiding golden glory round them. They will keep it as long as life shall last.











